

Passion



Per Stenbeck, international fundraising director, UNICEF, Geneva, introduces his three golden rules of fundraising.

Ladies and gentlemen, let me introduce to you the CEO of Microsoft, Mr. Steve Ballmer.

(Plays 1 minute 15 seconds video of Steve Ballmer entering the stage at an in-house Microsoft event, stating his passionate love for Microsoft.)

How would you describe what you have just seen? Madness? Showmanship? Passion? Did Steve Ballmer speak to the brains of his audience or to their hearts? I am sure everyone in that hall who saw his performance live, will remember it forever. So what can we learn from Steve Ballmer?

Passion is a Latin word. Its original meaning is suffering, as in the passion of Christ. But the meaning has gradually changed. Today passion stands for strong emotions – positive or negative. Passion is love and desire, but also hatred and anger. It is joy and despair, it is laughter and tears.

Some organisations seem to evoke passion more than others: Greenpeace is one of them. People love or hate Greenpeace. Few are indifferent. As a new executive director of Greenpeace Nordic ten years ago I participated in a direct action in the streets of Stockholm. When standing there in my Greenpeace overall one young lady came up to me and said, 'You are my hero. I wish my two boys would grow up to become one of you.' She took up her wallet and emptied its contents into my pocket. It was a very moving experience of love and trust.

A few minutes later a very old man came up to me and said, 'You think you stand above the law? People like you should be shot dead. I know what I talk about because I was active in the Nazi death commandos in the Baltics, during the World War.' I got really scared but he did not pull out a gun. He spat me in the face and left.

Now I work for Unicef. The truth is that no one hates Unicef. I guess that is good news. No more spitting at me in the streets. But does anyone love Unicef? Maybe not quite with the glow I experienced in Greenpeace.

So what are the qualities that distinguish a star fundraiser from a mediocre one? Lists of essential qualities usually mention social skills, marketing skills, empathy, creativity, persistence, persuasiveness and intuition, but usually the quality on top of the list is commitment. A strong commitment to your cause is a precondition for real success in fundraising. That separates fundraising from commercial marketing. You cannot be expected to embrace toilet paper, not to mention tobacco, with the same strong commitment as you would fighting child abuse, stopping whaling, or finding a cure for cancer. Commercial clients do not expect that commitment. Donors do.

Commitment is your inner conviction that your cause is a worthy one, something in which you believe one hundred percent. Such commitment is triggered by allowing fundraisers to see for themselves what positive difference their organisation can bring about. More than most charity staff, fundraisers need such exposure to feed their commitment. Make sure your organisation invests in commitment.

Commitment and passion go hand in hand. Passion is the manifestation of commitment. It is commitment brought to life.

Let me quote three great thinkers on passion. First the French philosopher de la Rochefoucauld, 'Passionate people are the only advocates that always persuade. The simplest man with passion will be more persuasive than the most eloquent without.'

Then let us listen to the German philosopher Hegel, 'Nothing great in the world has ever been accomplished without passion.'

Finally a really great thinker, Mr. Donald Trump, 'Without passion you don't have energy, without energy you have nothing.'

Some of us have a natural talent for passion, but all of us can learn to speak passionately about a cause we are truly committed to.

Passion speaks to your heart more than to your mind. That is why passion is such an important ally in fundraising because fundraising is a warmhearted affair. I guess most of you are familiar with the famous three step approach to fundraising, 'Open hearts, open minds, open checkbooks'. Always in that order. If you fail to open hearts your appeal will fail. It is therefore OK to be emotional in fundraising. It is OK to appeal to the heart rather than to the brain.

Tell stories from your own experience to allow your passion to flow – this is a true story of mine, which I have told on several occasions.

Some years ago when I worked for Swedish Save the Children I visited North Yemen, where we supported a number of primary health care clinics. The one in Taiz was located high up in the mountains. I was brought there early in the morning. It was dreadfully cold. When the clinic opened at 8 a.m. mothers and children bundled in lots of clothes had gathered by the entrance waiting patiently for help.

I immediately noticed two of the women carrying a baby each. The two babies were obviously in very bad shape: It turned out that one of them had pneumonia and the other suffered from acute diarrhea. The little child with pneumonia struggled to breathe. Her mother was taken to a stool next to a rusty oxygen container in the hallway and told to hold the oxygen mask in front of her daughter's face to support her breathing. I watched her fight for her daughter's life. Suddenly right in front of my eyes the beautiful little girl in her arms stopped breathing and died. I felt like an intruder standing there watching the mother in deep despair. At home in Sweden I had a healthy child the same age and I thought how desperately unfair our world is.

The other little girl with diarrhea was put on oral rehydration therapy. It is so easy and yet so magically effective. You simply tell the mother to spoon-feed her daughter with water mixed with sugar and salt for better absorption. After a few hours the difference was pure magic. The little girl had the sparkle back in her eyes and was in no danger any more. Primary health care clinics in Europe are about minor health issues. In the Third World they are about life and death. I have seen that with my own two eyes.

If I were to ask you – on your way out of this hall today – to please consider leaving a gift in support of this clinic in Taiz, North Yemen, would you not consider doing so? If you would, you have proved my point of the power of passionate storytelling.

Whenever I speak on fundraising I take the opportunity to quote my three golden rules.

- Be ready. Make sure to take the opportunity when it arises.
- Be bold. In fundraising you must take risks and aim high. If you want the Pope to endorse your campaign then go for it. Coca Cola will never get that. You just might. And I am just trying.
- Be passionate. Passionate fundraisers ignite passion also in donors. Passionate donors give more, lapse less and they are ready to support you, not only with money but also if you so wish with their voice and their actions. A passionate donor is a loyal donor, a true friend for life.

So bring out the passion from within and make it glow and shine in your fundraising. You will definitely raise more money. You may even change the world in the process. After all, only fiery spirits with real passion do.

Let me finally paraphrase Microsoft's Steve Ballmer from my opening.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I have four words for you:

I – **believe** – **in** – **passion**. If you agree, please say the four words with me:

I – believe – in – passion

Thank you.

This paper is taken from a presentation delivered by Per Stenbeck to the twenty-seventh International Fundraising Congress in Noordwijkerhout, Holland in October 2007. © Per Stenbeck 2007.